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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 000171

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/FO AND AF/E
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

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TAGS: PREL MOPS MARR PREF ET SO KE

SUBJECT: SOMALIA: REDEPLOYMENT OF ETHIOPIAN TROOPS

REF: ADDIS ABABA 115 (NOTAL)

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (A), (B), (D).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY. Ambassador and DATT met with ENDF Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Samora Yonus on Ethiopia's decision to redeploy troops at a critical juncture in operations to capture/neutralize extremist elements of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC). General Samora provided an overly optimistic view of conditions in Somalia. He stated that the ENDF had met its major objectives to weaken and disband extremist elements; he also noted the cost of the war, and its toll on troops from combat and disease, specifically malaria. He made clear that the ENDF would continue operations against targets in Somalia. ENDF forces were ready to depart as soon as IGASOM troops arrived, but would be able to return to Somalia, if necessary. We also raised reports of harassment of the MSF, and press reports of ENDF attacks on refugees. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S/NF) Ambassador and DATT met with General Samora on January 22 to discuss redeployment of Ethiopian troops from areas of operations in the south of Somalia to Kismayo. Samora made clear that major operations in Somalia were over, and that their main objectives of disbanding and weakening the fighting capability of the extremist elements of the Council of Islamic Courts were successful. He added that the CIC no longer exists. Further, the cost of conducting the war in Somalia had severely taxed Ethiopia's finances, and redeployment of forces to Kismayo, as well as other central areas in Somalia, would help stem the financial drain. Finally, he said that Ethiopian troops needed to resupply, and that malaria had become a concern for ENDF units, posing a challenge for ENDF troop operations. The general and other senior ENDF military have asked us for anti-malaria medicine.

¶3. (S/NF) General Samora made clear that the ENDF can continue to conduct operations from Kismayo against targets in southern Somalia and along the Kenyan border. He said the ENDF remained capable of acting, and would act on intelligence from Ethiopian sources, as well as any information/guidance from other sources, against specific targets.

ETHIOPIA READY FOR PHASED WITHDRAWAL

¶ 14. (S/NF) General Samora noted that Ethiopian troops would be ready to leave Somalia immediately, but in phases. They would not depart in significant numbers until IGASOM troops arrived. He told the Ambassador and DATT that IGASOM troops were needed now. Ethiopian forces were eager to depart, but could return to Somalia, if necessary, he said.

¶ 15. (S/NF) The return of extremist elements to Mogadishu to wage an insurgency, while a concern, would not be a factor in the short term, General Samora said. He noted that such elements lacked a force to back their insurgent efforts. Further, TFG President Yusuf and other TFG officials were engaging other clan elders politically, and needed to be supported (pushed) to continue these efforts. This would undercut any insurgency, he said.

MISINFORMED PRESS REPORTS

¶ 16. (S/NF) Ambassador raised recent reports from the UN on the death of one Somali worker, attacks on Somali refugees crossing into Kenya, and the taking of medical files from the Medecins Sans Frontieres in Dinsoor (septel). The General replied that the ENDF and his top generals had investigated these allegations and concluded that much of the poor press was disinformation/misinformation. Samora noted that no UN Somali worker had been tortured or killed by the ENDF, and there are no credible reports of attacks on refugees by the ENDF. Responding to the medical files, he replied that MSF Somali staff had provided copies and originals of files to the ENDF, and that the MSF Somali

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medical officials maintained files as well. Reports of wrongdoing continued to be investigated, he said.

¶ 17. (S/NF) COMMENT: Angst over Kenyan forces, rather than ENDF troops, taking the lead against extremist elements who had crossed from Somalia into Kenya, have been cited as the catalyst for the ENDF decision to redeploy their forces away from the Kenya border to Kismayo. Other factors played a role in the Ethiopian decision. The Ethiopian leadership assured us that their redeployment does not undercut their objectives to neutralize extremist elements or their capability to launch attacks against targets. Cooperation with the Ethiopian leadership remains strong and vibrant. Prime Minister Meles and his senior leadership, however, have constantly cited the expense of Somali operations, the success of meeting overall immediate objectives, and the effect of malaria/fatigue on troops. The redeployment also underscores the urgency of IGASOM troop deployment and the strong desire of the ENDF to depart Somalia now to limit their casualties.

¶ 18. (S/NF) COMMENT CONTINUED: The Prime Minister wants to get the bulk of his troops out of Somalia, but keep some troops for training and supporting the TFG. Despite General Samora's overly optimistic view of Somalia operations, there is a very deep concern in the Ethiopian leadership that extremists will return to Mogadishu and implement an insurgency operation, threatening the stability of the fragile TFG. Meles faces pressures at home to return the troops from Somalia and, more importantly, address the more pressing economic issues of rising fuel and food prices. In this context, the PM's request for food assistance for Ethiopian's urban poor (reftel) should be addressed as soon as possible. END COMMENT.

YAMAMOTO